

# Building more connected schools

Information for principals, teachers and school staff

As professional educators we know that improvements in educational outcomes for Indigenous students start with increased attendance.

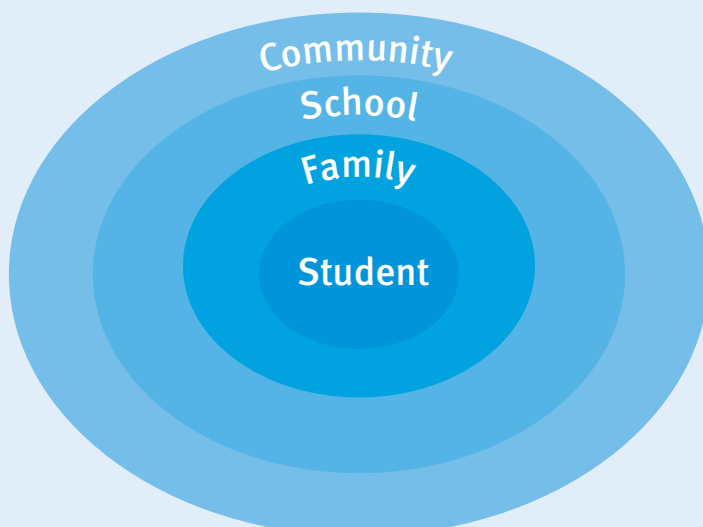
The evidence clearly shows that the schools with the best improvements in attendance rates have been those with the greatest levels of connectedness.

These are the schools where the principal and staff make the students feel valued, their families welcome and where the school is a hub for activity in the community.

Successful teachers and principals know the value of engaging with families and communities. Most principals are great communicators and strive to develop relationships with the families and their local community.

Research shows that school connectedness is one of the key components in building a child's resilience and thus increasing their chances of surviving the most difficult of life circumstances. Researchers have found that in a study involving over 2000 students, the degree to which a student felt connected to a school was a predictor for whether the student would develop mental health problems such as depression and anxiety.

## Student-centred connections



## What does a connected school look like?

It's a whole school approach where the emphasis is on the creation of a school community with interaction between all levels of the school and the wider community to achieve mutually beneficial relationships. These endorse values of empathy, warmth, acceptance, openness, friendliness and democracy. The Mackie Connectedness Gauge checklist (at <http://deta.qld.gov.au/indigenous/>) lists a range of questions to prompt analysis by school leaders of their own school's measure of connectedness.

Dr Chris Sarra's Stronger and Smarter approach also lays great emphasis on building a positive relationship between the school and the community. Key elements here are building a strong sense of Indigenous identity in the school population, a set of high expectations of what Indigenous children can achieve, and a drawing upon the Indigenous leadership within the community to contribute to the education of the children.

### The school connectedness pipeline



Contrast this with the toxic pipeline, which links lack of connectedness with juvenile criminality. What is known as the school to prison pipeline is created when school exclusions lead to these students being more likely to not return to school which is in turn predictive of imprisonment.

### The toxic pipeline



Indigenous students are over-represented in each stage of this pipeline.

Connected schools are turning this around. For more information and for video clips showcasing best practice in connectedness in Queensland state schools, visit [www.education.qld.gov.au/indigenous](http://www.education.qld.gov.au/indigenous)

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